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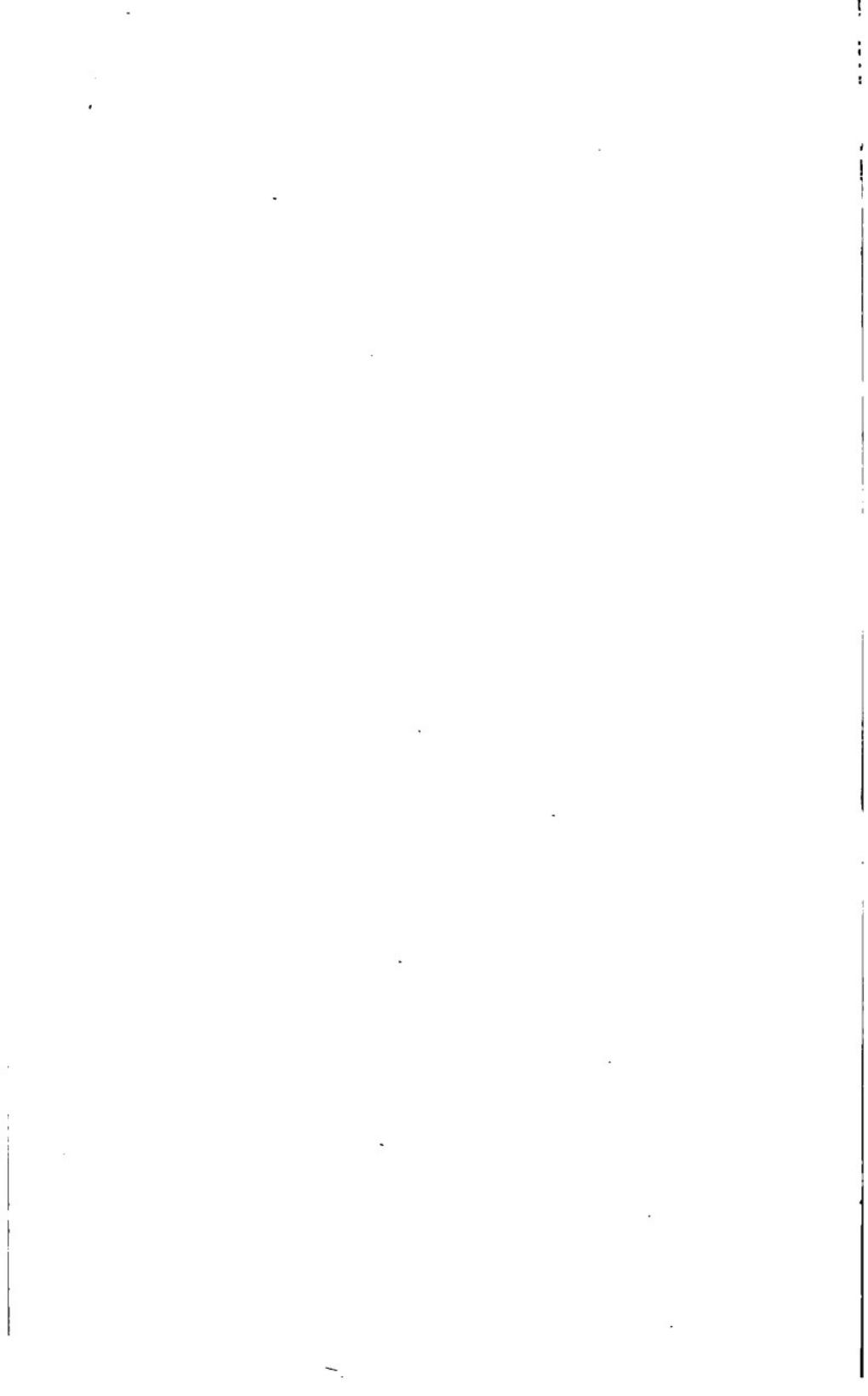
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DRAMATIC IDYLS

SECOND SERIES

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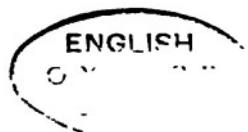


DRAMATIC IDYLS

SECOND SERIES

BY

ROBERT BROWNING



LONDON

SMITH, ELDER, & CO., 15 WATERLOO PLACE

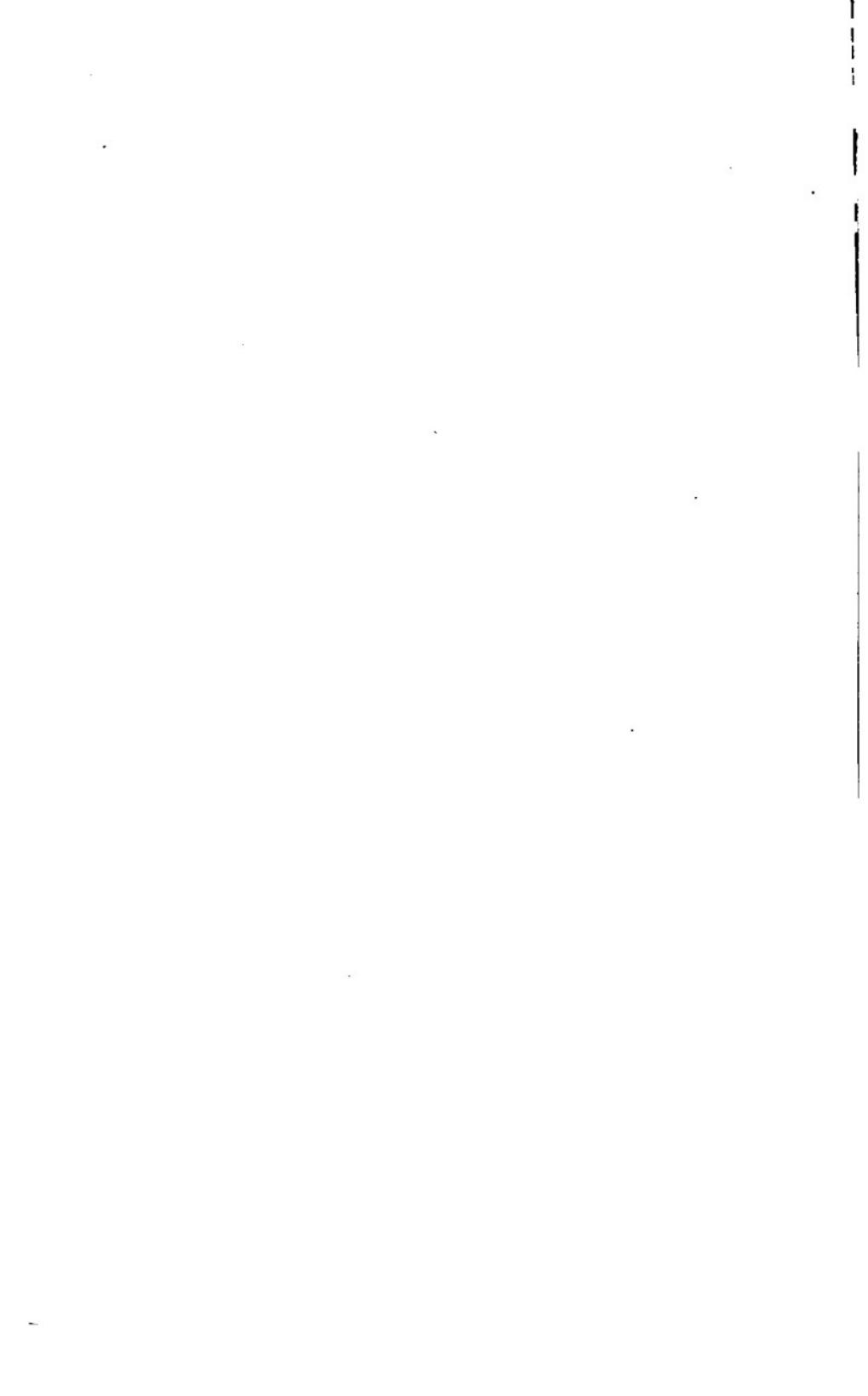
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“ You are sick, that ’s sure ”—they say :

“ Sick of what ? ”—they disagree.

“ ’T is the brain ”—thinks Doctor A.,

“ ’T is the heart ”—holds Doctor B.,

“ The liver—my life I ’d lay ! ”

“ The lungs ! ” “ The lights ! ”

Ah me !

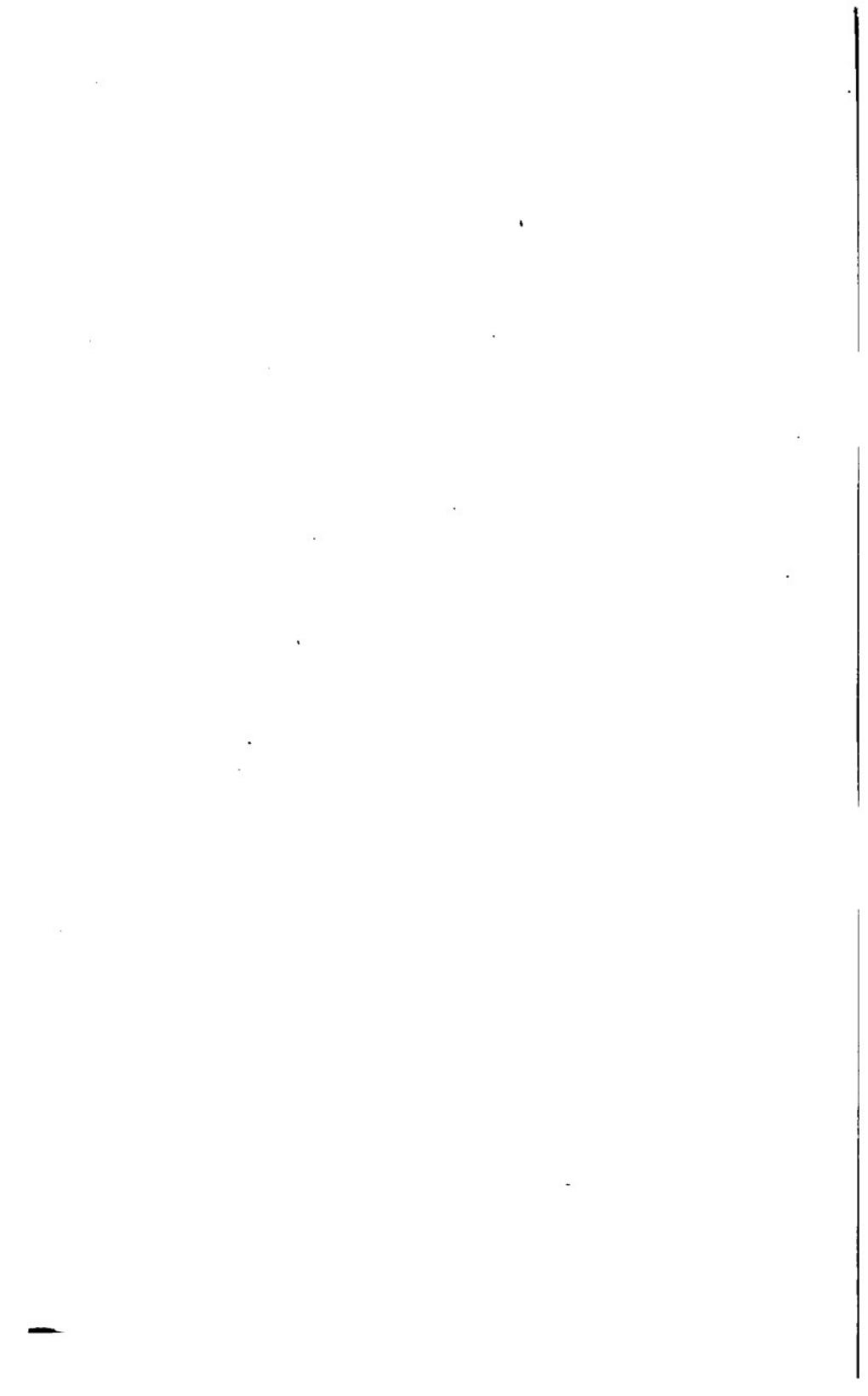
So ignorant of man’s whole

Of bodily organs plain to see—

So sage and certain, frank and free,

About what ’s under lock and key—

Man’s soul !



ECHETLOS.

II.

B



ECHETLOS.

Here is a story, shall stir you ! Stand up, Greeks dead
and gone,

Who breasted, beat Barbarians, stemmed Persia rolling
on,

Did the deed and saved the world, since the day was
Marathon !

No man but did his manliest, kept rank and fought
away

In his tribe and file : up, back, out, down—was the
spear-arm play :

Like a wind-whipt branchy wood, all spear-arms a-swing
that day !

But one man kept no rank and his sole arm plied no
spear,

As a flashing came and went, and a form i' the van, the
rear,

Brightened the battle up, for he blazed now there, now
here.

Nor helmed nor shielded, he ! but, a goat-skin all his
wear,

Like a tiller of the soil, with a clown's limbs broad and
bare,

Went he ploughing on and on : he pushed with a plough-
man's share.

Did the weak mid-line give way, as tunnies on whom the
shark

Precipitates his bulk ? Did the right-wing halt when,
stark

On his heap of slain lay stretched Kallimachos Polemarch ?

Did the steady phalanx falter ? To the rescue, at the need,
The clown was ploughing Persia, clearing Greek earth of
weed,

As he routed through the Sakian and rooted up the Mede.

'But the deed done, battle won,—nowhere to be descried
On the meadow, by the stream, at the marsh,—look far
and wide

From the foot of the mountain, no, to the last blood-
plashed sea-side,—

Not anywhere on view blazed the large limbs thonged
and brown,

Shearing and clearing still with the share before which—
down

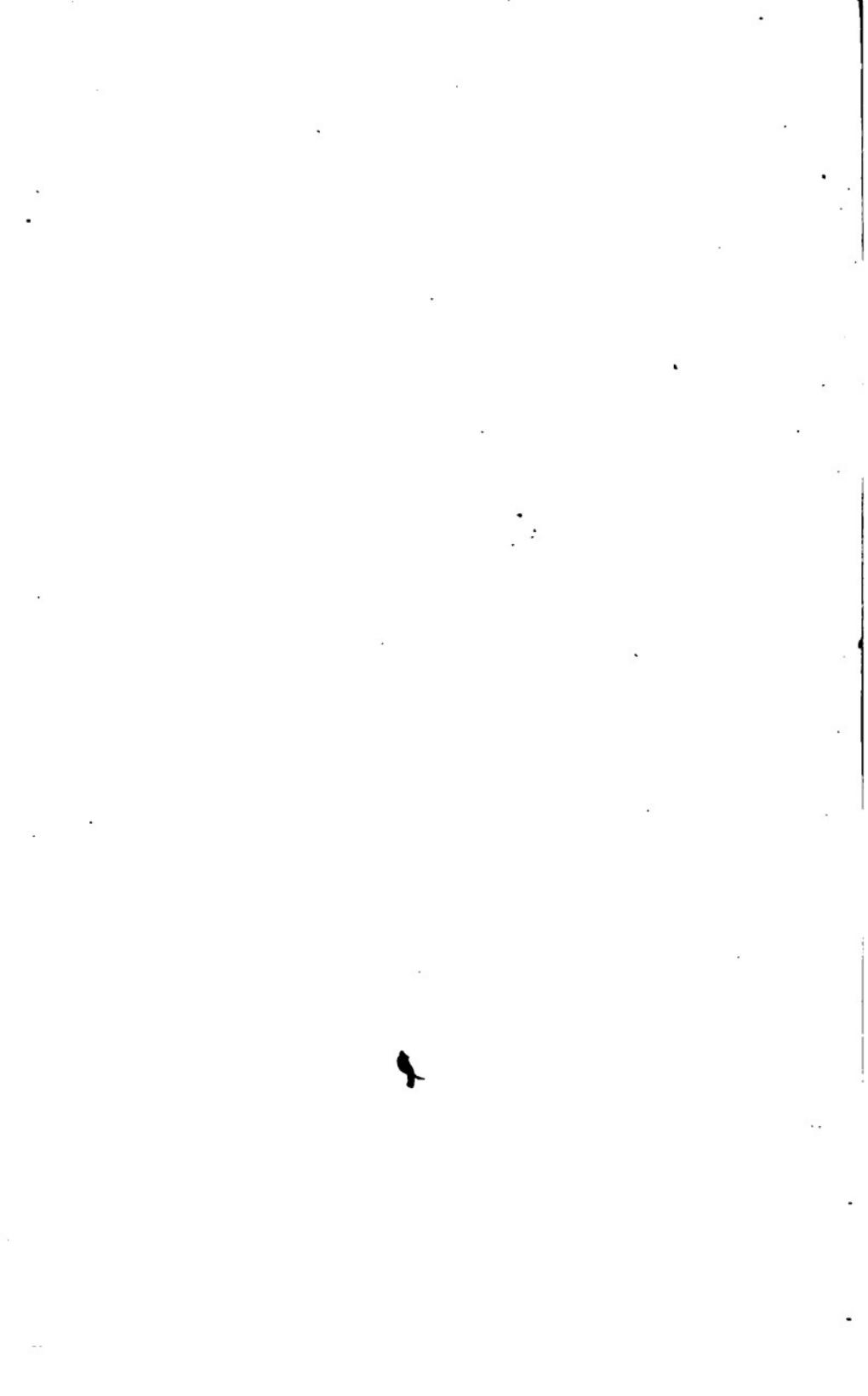
To the dust went Persia's pomp, as he ploughed for
Greece, that clown !

How spake the Oracle? "Care for no name at all!
Say but just this : We praise one helpful whom we call

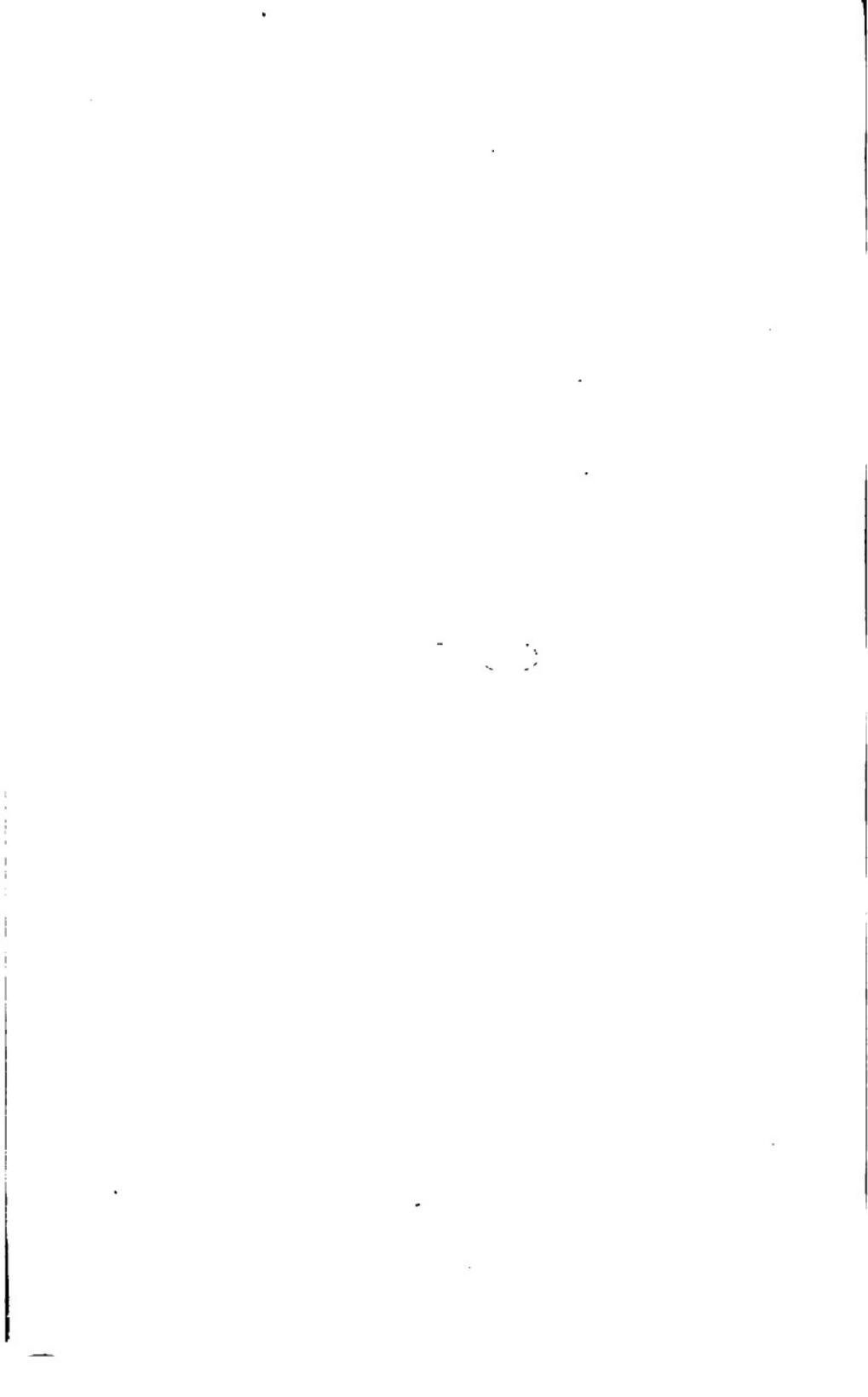
The Holder of the Ploughshare. The great deed ne'er
grows small."

Not the great name ! Sing—woe for the great name
Miltiadés

And its end at Paros isle ! Woe for Themistokles
—Satrap in Sardis court ! Name not the clown like
these !



CLIVE.



CLIVE.

I and Clive were friends—and why not? Friends! I
think you laugh, my lad.

Clive it was gave England India, while your father gives
—egad,

England nothing but the graceless boy who lures him on
to speak—

“ Well, Sir, you and Clive were comrades—” with
a tongue thrust in your cheek!

Very true : in my eyes, your eyes, all the world's eyes,

Clive was man,

I was, am and ever shall be—mouse, nay, mouse of all
its clan

Sorriest sample, if you take the kitchen's estimate for fame;
While the man Clive—he fought Plassy, spoiled the
clever foreign game,

Conquered and annexed and Englished !

Never mind ! As o'er my punch
(You away) I sit of evenings,—silence, save for biscuit
crunch,

Black, unbroken,—thought grows busy, thrids each path-
way of old years,

Notes this forthright, that meander, till the long-past life
appears

Like an outspread map of country plodded through, each
mile and rood,

Once, and well remembered still,—I'm startled in my
solitude

Ever and anon by—what's the sudden mocking light that
breaks

On me as I slap the table till no rummer-glass but shakes
While I ask—aloud, I do believe, God help me!—“Was
it thus?

Can it be that so I faltered, stopped when just one step
for us—”

(Us,—you were not born, I grant, but surely some day
born would be)

“—One bold step had gained a province” (figurative
talk, you see)

"Got no end of wealth and honor,—yet I stood stock
still no less?"

—"For I was not Clive," you comment: but it needs
no Clive to guess

Wealth were handy, honor ticklish, did no writing on
the wall

Warn me "Trespasser, 'ware man-traps!" Him who
braves that notice—call

Hero! none of such heroics suit myself who read plain
words,

Doff my hat, and leap no barrier. Scripture says, the
land 's the Lord's :

Louts then—what avail the thousand, noisy in a smock-
frocked ring,

All-agog to have me trespass, clear the fence, be Clive
their king?

Higher warrant must you show me ere I set one foot
before

T'other in that dark direction, though I stand for ever-
more

Poor as Job and meek as Moses. Evermore? No!
Bye and bye

Job grows rich and Moses valiant, Clive turns out less
wise than I.

Do n't object "Why call him friend, then?" Power is
power, my boy, and still

Marks a man,—God's gift magnific, exercised for good
or ill.

You've your boot now on my hearth-rug, tread what was
a tiger's skin :

Rarely such a royal monster as I lodged the bullet in !

True, he murdered half a village, so his own death came
to pass ;

Still, for size and beauty, cunning, courage—ah, the brute
he was !

Why, that Clive,—that youth, that greenhorn, that quill-
driving clerk, in fine,—

He sustained a siege in Arcot. . . But the world knows !

Pass the wine.

Where did I break off at? How bring Clive in? Oh,
you mentioned “fear” !

Just so : and, said I, that minds me of a story you shall
hear.

We were friends then, Clive and I : so, when the clouds,
about the orb

Late supreme, encroaching slowly, surely, threatened to
absorb

Ray by ray its noontide brilliance,—friendship might, with
steadier eye

Drawing near, bear what had burned else, now no blaze
all majesty.

Too much bee's-wing floats my figure ? Well, suppose a
castle 's new :

None presume to climb its ramparts, none find foothold
sure for shoe

'Twixt those squares and squares of granite plating the
impervious pile

As his scale-mail's warty iron cuirasses a crocodile.

Reels that castle thunder-smitten, storm-dismantled ?

From without

Scrambling up by crack and crevice, every cockney prates
about

Towers—the heap he kicks now! turrets—just the measure
of his cane !

Will that do ? Observe moreover—(same similitude
again)—

Such a castle seldom crumbles by sheer stress of can-
nonade :

'T is when foes are foiled and fighting 's finished that
vile rains invade,

Grass o'ergrows, o'ergrows till night-birds congregating
find no holes

Fit to build in like the topmost sockets made for
banner-poles.

So Clive crumbled slow in London, crashed at last.

A week before,

Dining with him,—after trying churchyard-chat of days
of yore,—

Both of us stopped, tired as tombstones, head-piece foot-
piece, when they lean
Each to other, drowsed in fog-smoke, o'er a coffined
Past between.

As I saw his head sink heavy, guessed the soul's extin-
guishment

By the glazing eyeball, noticed how the furtive fingers
went

Where a drug-box skulked behind the honest liquor,—
“One more throw

Try for Clive !” thought I : “ Let 's venture some good
rattling question !” So—

“Come Clive, tell us”—out I blurted—“what to tell in
turn, years hence,

When my boy—suppose I have one—asks me on what
evidence

I maintain my friend of Plassy proved a warrior every whit
Worth your Alexanders, Cæsars, Marlboroughs and—
what said Pitt?—

Frederick the Fierce himself! Clive told me once”—I
want to say—

“Which feat out of all those famous doings bore the bell
away

—In his own calm estimation, mark you, not the mob’s
rough guess—

Which stood foremost as evincing what Clive called
courageousness!

Come ! what moment of the minute, what speck-centre
in the wide

Circle of the action saw your mortal fairly deified ?

(Let alone that filthy sleep-stuff, swallow bold this whole-
some Port !)

If a friend has leave to question,—when were you most
brave, in short ? ”

Up he arched his brows o' the instant—formidably Clive
again.

“ When was I most brave ? I 'd answer, were the instance
half as plain

As another instance that 's a brain-lodged crystal—curse
it !—here

Freezing when my memory touches—ugh—the time I
felt most fear.

Ugh ! I cannot say for certain if I showed fear—anyhow,
Fear I felt, and, very likely, shuddered, since I shiver
now."

"Fear !" smiled I. "Well, that 's the rarer : that 's a
specimen to seek,
Ticket up in one's museum, *Mind-Freaks, Lord Clive's*
Fear, Unique !"

Down his brows dropped. On the table painfully he
pored as though
Tracing, in the stains and streaks there, thoughts en-
crusted long ago.

When he spoke 't was like a lawyer reading word by word
some will,

Some blind jungle of a statement,—beating on and on
until

Out there leaps fierce life to fight with.

“ This fell in my factor-days.

Desk-drudge, slaving at St. David's, one must game, or
drink, or craze.

I chose gaming: and, — because your high-flown
gamesters hardly take

Umbrage at a factor's elbow if the factor pays his stake,—
I was winked at in a circle where the company was choice,
Captain This and Major That, men high of colour, loud
of voice,

Yet indulgent, condescending to the modest juvenile
Who not merely risked but lost his hard-earned guineas
with a smile.

Down I sat to cards, one evening,—had for my antagonist
Somebody whose name 's a secret—you 'll know why—
so, if you list,

Call him Cock o' the Walk, my scarlet son of Mars from
head to heel !

Play commenced : and, whether Cocky fancied that a
clerk must feel

Quite sufficient honour came of bending over one green
baize,

I the scribe with him the warrior, guessed no penman
dared to raise

Shadow of objection should the honour stay but playing
end

More or less abruptly,—whether disinclined he grew
to spend

'Practice strictly scientific on a booby born to stare
At—not ask of—lace-and-ruffles if the hand they hide
plays fair,—

Anyhow, I marked a movement when he bade me 'Cut!'

"I rose.

'Such the new manœuvre, Captain? I 'm a novice:
knowledge grows.

What, you force a card, you cheat, Sir?'

"Never did a thunder-clap
Cause emotion, startle Thyrsis locked with Chloe in his
lap,

As my word and gesture (down I flung my cards to join
the pack)

Fired the man of arms, whose visage, simply red before,
turned black.

When he found his voice, he stammered 'That expression once again !'

"'Well, you forced a card and cheated !'

"' Possibly a factor's brain,
Busied with his all-important balance of accounts, may
deem

Weighing words superfluous trouble : *cheat* to clerkly
ears may seem

Just the joke for friends to venture : but we are not
friends, you see !

When a gentleman is joked with,—if he 's good at re-
partee,

He rejoins, as I do—Sirrah, on your knees, withdraw in
full !

Beg my pardon, or be sure a kindly bullet through your
skull

Lets in light and teaches manners to what brain it finds!

Choose quick—

Have your life snuffed out or, kneeling, pray me trim
yon candle-wick !'

"' Well, you cheated !'

"Then outbroke a howl from all the friends around.
To his feet sprang each in fury, fists were clenched and
teeth were ground.

'End it ! no time like the present ! Captain, yours were
our disgrace !

No delay, begin and finish ! Stand back, leave the pair
a space !

Let civilians be instructed : henceforth simply ply the pen,
Fly the sword ! This clerk 's no swordsman ? Suit him
with a pistol, then !

Even odds ! A dozen paces 'twixt the most and least
expert

Make a dwarf a giant's equal : nay, the dwarf, if he 's
alert,

Likelier hits the broader target !'

"Up we stood accordingly.
As they handed me the weapon, such was my soul's
thirst to try

Then and there conclusions with this bully, tread on and
stamp out

Every spark of his existence, that,—crept close to, curled
about

By that toying tempting teasing fool-forefinger's middle
joint,—

Do n't you guess? — the trigger yielded. Gone my
chance! and at the point
Of such prime success moreover: scarce an inch above
his head

Went my ball to hit the wainscot. He was living, I was
dead

“Up he marched in flaming triumph—'t was his right,
mind!—up, within
Just an arm's length. ‘Now, my clerkling,’ chuckled
Cocky with a grin
As the levelled piece quite touched me, ‘Now, Sir
Counting-House, repeat

That expression which I told you proved bad manners !
Did I cheat ?'

" 'Cheat you did, you knew you cheated, and, this
moment, know as well.

As for me, my homely breeding bids you—fire and go to
Hell !

" Twice the muzzle touched my forehead. Heavy barrel,
flurried wrist,
Either spoils a steady lifting. Thrice : then, ' Laugh at
Hell who list,
I can 't ! God 's no fable either. Did this boy's eye
wink once ? No !

There 's no standing him and Hell and God all three
against me,—so,

I did cheat !'

"And down he threw the pistol, out rushed—by
the door

Possibly, but, as for knowledge if by chimney, roof or
floor,

He effected disappearance—I 'll engage no glance was
sent

That way by a single starer, such a blank astonishment
Swallowed up the senses : as for speaking—mute they
stood as mice.

"Mute not long, though ! Such reaction, such a hubbub
in a trice !

' Rogue and rascal ! Who 'd have thought it ? What 's
to be expected next,

When His Majesty's Commission serves a sharper as
pretext

For . . . But where 's the need of wasting time now ?

Nought requires delay :

Punishment the Service cries for : let disgrace be wiped
away

Publicly, in good broad daylight ! Resignation ? No,
indeed !

Drum and fife must play the Rogue's-March, rank and
file be free to speed

Tardy marching on the rogue's part by appliance in the
rear

—Kicks administered shall right this wronged civilian,—

never fear,

Mister Clive, for—though a clerk—you bore yourself—

suppose we say—

Just as would beseem a soldier !'

" ' Gentlemen, attention—pray !

First, one word !'

" I passed each speaker severally in review.

When I had precise their number, names and styles, and

fully knew

Over whom my supervision thenceforth must extend,—

why, then —

" ' Some five minutes since, my life lay—as you all saw,

gentlemen,

At the mercy of your friend there. Not a single voice
was raised

In arrest of judgment, not one tongue — before my
powder blazed —

Ventured “Can it be the youngster blundered, really
seemed to mark

Some irregular proceeding? We conjecture in the dark,
Guess at random,—still, for sake of fair play—what if
for a freak,

In a fit of absence,—such things have been!—if our
friend proved weak

—What’s the phrase?—corrected fortune! Look into
the case, at least!”

Who dared interpose between the altar’s victim and the
priest?

Yet he spared me ! You eleven ! Whosoever, all or each,
Utters—to the disadvantage of the man who spared me
—speech
—To his face, behind his back,—that speaker has to do
with me :

Me who promise, if positions change and mine the
chance should be,

Not to imitate your friend and waive advantage !'

"Twenty-five

Years ago this matter happened : and 't is certain," added
Clive,

"Never, to my knowledge, did Sir Cocky have a single
breath

Breathed against him : lips were closed throughout his
life, or since his death,

For if he be dead or living I can tell no more than you.
All I know is—Cocky had one chance more ; how he
used it,—grew

Out of such unlucky habits, or relapsed, and back again
Brought the late-ejected devil with a score more in his
train,—

That 's for you to judge. Reprieveal I procured, at any
rate.

Ugh—the memory of that minute s fear makes goose-
flesh rise ! Why prate
Longer ? You 've my story, there 's your instance : fear
I did, you see ! ”

“Well”—I hardly kept from laughing —“if I see it,
thanks must be

Wholly to your Lordship's candour. Not that—in a
common case—

When a bully caught at cheating thrusts a pistol in one's
face,

I should under-rate, believe me, such a trial to the
nerve !

'T is no joke, at one-and-twenty, for a youth to stand nor
swerve.

Fear I naturally look for—unless, of all men alive,
I am forced to make exception when I come to Robert
Clive.

Since at Arcot, Plassy, elsewhere, he and death—the
whole world knows—

Came to somewhat closer quarters."

Quarters? Had we come to blows,

Clive and I, you had not wondered—up he sprang so,

out he rapped

Such a round of oaths—no matter! I'll endeavour to adapt

To our modern usage words he—well, 't was friendly

licence—flung

At me like so many fire-balls, fast as he could wag his

tongue.

“ You—a soldier? You—at Plassy? Yours the faculty

to nick

Instantaneously occasion when your foe, if lightning-quick,

—At his mercy, at his malice,—has you, through some

stupid inch

Undefended in your bulwark? Thus laid open,—not to

flinch

—That needs courage, you 'll concede me. Then, look here ! Suppose the man, Checking his advance, his weapon still extended, not a span Distant from my temple,—curse him !—quietly had bade me ‘ There !

Keep your life, calumniator !—worthless life I freely spare :

Mine you freely would have taken—murdered me and my good fame

Both at once—and all the better ! Go, and thank your own bad aim

Which permits me to forgive you !’ What if, with such words as these,

He had cast away his weapon ? How should I have borne me, please ?

Nay, I 'll spare you pains and tell you. This, and only
this, remained—

Pick his weapon up and use it on myself. I so had
gained

Sleep the earlier, leaving England probably to pay on still
Rent and taxes for half India, tenant at the Frenchman's
will."

"Such the turn" said I "the matter takes with you ?

Then I abate

—No, by not one jot nor tittle,—of your act my estimate.
Fear—I wish I could detect there : courage fronts me,
plain enough—

Call it desperation, madness—never mind ! for here 's in
rough

Why, had mine been such a trial, fear had overcome
disgrace.

True, disgrace were hard to bear : but such a rush against
God's face

—None of that for me, Lord Plassy, since I go to church
at times,

Say the creed my mother taught me ! Many years in
foreign climes

Rub some marks away—not all, though ! We poor
sinners reach life's brink,

Overlook what rolls beneath it, recklessly enough, but think
There 's advantage in what 's left us—ground to stand
on, time to call

'Lord, have mercy !' ere we topple over—do not leap,
that 's all !"

Oh, he made no answer,—re-absorbed into his cloud. I

caught

Something like “Yes—courage: only fools will call it
fear.”

If aught

Comfort you, my great unhappy hero Clive, in that I
heard,

Next week, how your own hand dealt you doom, and
uttered just the word

“Fearfully courageous!”—this, be sure, and nothing
else I groaned.

I’m no Clive, nor parson either: Clive’s worst deed—
we’ll hope condoned.

MULÉYKEH.

MULÉYKEH.

If a stranger passed the tent of Hóseyn, he cried "A
churl's!"

Or haply "God help the man who has neither salt nor
bread!"

—“Nay,” would a friend exclaim, “he needs nor pity
nor scorn

More than who spends small thought on the shore-sand,
picking pearls,

—Holds but in light esteem the seed-sort, bears instead
On his breast a moon-like prize, some orb which of night
makes morn.

“ What if no flocks and herds enrich the son of Sinán ?
They went when his tribe was mulct, ten thousand camels
the due,
Blood-value paid perforce for a murder done of old.
‘ God gave them, let them go ! But never since time began,
Muléykeh, peerless mare, owned master the match of you,
And you are my prize, my Pearl : I laugh at men’s land
and gold ! ’

“ So in the pride of his soul laughs Hóseyn—and right,
I say.
Do the ten steeds run a race of glory ? Outstripping all,
Ever Muléykeh stands first steed at the victor’s staff.
Who started, the owner’s hope, gets shamed and named,
that day,

'Silence,' or, last but one, is 'The Cuffed,' as we use to
call

Whom the paddock's lord thrusts forth. Right, Hóseyn,
I say, to laugh."

"Boasts he Muléykeh the Pearl?" the stranger replies:

"Be sure

On him I waste nor scorn nor pity, but lavish both
On Duhl the son of Sheybán, who withers away in heart
For envy of Hóseyn's luck. Such sickness admits no
cure.

A certain poet has sung, and sealed the same with an
oath,

'For the vulgar—flocks and herds! The Pearl is a prize
apart.'"

Lo, Duhl the son of Sheybán comes riding to Hóseyn's
tent,

And he casts his saddle down, and enters and "Peace"
bids he.

"You are poor, I know the cause : my plenty shall mend
the wrong.

"T is said of your Pearl—the price of a hundred camels
spent

In her purchase were scarce ill paid : such prudence is
far from me

Who proffer a thousand. Speak ! Long parley may last
too long."

Said Hóseyn "You feed young beasts a many, of famous
breed,

Slit-eared, unblemished, fat, true offspring of Múzennem :
There stumbles no weak-eyed she in the line as it climbs
the hill.

But I love Muléykeh's face : her forefront whitens indeed
Like a yellowish wave's cream-crest. Your camels—go
gaze on them !

Her fetlock is foam-splashed too. Myself am the richer
still."

A year goes by : lo, back to the tent again rides Duhl.
" You are open-hearted, ay—moist-handed, a very prince.
Why should I speak of sale ? Be the mare your simple
gift !

My son is pined to death for her beauty : my wife
prompts ' Fool,

Beg for his sake the Pearl ! Be God the rewarder, since
God pays debts seven for one : who squanders on Him
shows thrift.' "

Said Hóseyn "God gives each man one life, like a lamp,

then gives

That lamp due measure of oil : lamp lighted—hold high,
wave wide

Its comfort for others to share ! once quench it, what
help is left ?

The oil of your lamp is your son : I shine while Mu-
léykeh lives.

Would I beg your son to cheer my dark if Muléykeh died ?
It is life against life : what good avails to the life-
bereft ? "

Another year, and—hist ! What craft is it Duhl de-signs ?

He alights not at the door of the tent as he did last time,

But, creeping behind, he gropes his stealthy way by the trench

Half-round till he finds the flap in the folding, for night combines

With the robber—and such is he : Duhl, covetous up to crime,

Must wring from Hóseyn's grasp the Pearl, by whatever the wrench.

“ He was hunger-bitten, I heard : I tempted with half my store,

And a gibe was all my thanks. Is he generous like
Spring dew?

Account the fault to me who chaffered with such an one !
He has killed, to feast chance comers, the creature he
rode : nay, more—

For a couple of singing-girls his robe has he torn in two :
I will beg ! Yet I nowise gained by the tale of my wife
and son.

“ I swear by the Holy House, my head will I never wash
Till I filch his Pearl away. Fair dealing I tried, then
guile,

And now I resort to force. He said we must live or die :
Let him die, then,—let me live ! Be bold—but not too
rash !

I have found me a peeping-place : breast, bury your
breathing while

I explore for myself ! Now, breathe ! He deceived me
not, the spy !

"As he said—there lies in peace Hóseyn—how happy !

Beside

Stands tethered the Pearl : thrice winds her headstall
about his wrist :

'T is therefore he sleeps so sound—the moon through the
roof reveals.

And, loose on his left, stands too that other, known far
and wide,

Buhéyseh, her sister born : fleet is she yet ever missed
The winning tail's fire-flash a-stream past the thunderous
heels.

“ No less she stands saddled and bridled, this second, in
case some thief

Should enter and seize and fly with the first, as I mean
to do.

What then? The Pearl is the Pearl : once mount her
we both escape.”

Through the skirt-fold in glides Duhl,—so a serpent dis-
turb no leaf

In a bush as he parts the twigs entwining a nest : clean
through,

He is noiselessly at his work : as he planned, he performs
the rape.

He has set the tent-door wide, has buckled the girth,
has clipped

The headstall away from the wrist he leaves thrice bound
as before,

He springs on the Pearl, is launched on the desert like
bolt from bow.

Up starts our plundered man : from his breast though
the heart be ripped,

Yet his mind has the mastery : behold, in a minute
more,

He is out and off and away on Buhéyseh, whose worth
we know !

And Hóseyn—his blood turns flame, he has learned long
since to ride,

And Buhéyseh does her part,—they gain—they are gaining
fast

On the fugitive pair, and Duhl has Ed-Dárraj to cross
and quit,

And to reach the ridge El-Sabán,—no safety till that be
spied !

And Buhéyseh is, bound by bound, but a horse-length off
at last,

For the Pearl has missed the tap of the heel, the touch
of the bit.

She shortens her stride, she chafes at her rider the
strange and queer :

Buhéyseh is mad with hope—beat sister she shall and
must,

Though Duhl, of the hand and heel so clumsy, she has
to thank.

She is near now, nose by tail—they are neck by croup—
joy ! fear !

What folly makes Hóseyn shout “Dog Duhl, Damned
son of the Dust,

Touch the right ear and press with your foot my Pearl’s
left flank !”

And Duhl was wise at the word, and Muléykeh as prompt
perceived

Who was urging redoubled pace, and to hear him was to
obey,

And a leap indeed gave she, and evanished for ever
more.

And Hóseyn looked one long last look as who, all
bereaved,

Looks, fain to follow the dead so far as the living may :
Then he turned Buhéyseh's neck slow homeward, weeping
sore.

And, lo, in the sunrise, still sat Hóseyen upon the ground
Weeping : and neighbours came, the tribesmen of Bénu-
Asád

In the vale of green Er-Rass, and they questioned him
of his grief ;

And he told from first to last how, serpent-like, Duhl
had wound

His way to the nest, and how Duhl rode like an ape, so
bad !

And how Buhéyseh did wonders, yet Pearl remained
with the thief.

And they jeered him, one and all : “Poor Hóseyn is
crazed past hope !

How else had he wrought himself his ruin, in fortune’s
spite ?

To have simply held the tongue were a task for a boy or
girl,

And here were Muléykeh again, the eyed like an ante-
lope,

The child of his heart by day, the wife of his breast by
night !”—

“ And the beaten in speed ! ” wept Hóseyn : “ You never
have loved my Pearl.”



PIETRO OF ABANO.



PIETRO OF ABANO.

Petrus Aponensis—there was a magician !

When that strange adventure happened, which I mean to

tell my hearers,

Nearly had he tried all trades—beside physician,

Architect, astronomer, astrologer,—or worse :

How else, as the old books warrant, was he able,

All at once, through all the world, to prove the promptest

of appearers

Where was prince to cure, tower to build as high as

Babel,

Star to name or sky-sign read,—yet pouch, for pains, a
curse?

—Curse : for when a vagrant,—foot-sore, travel-tattered,
Now a young man, now an old man, Turk or Arab, Jew
or Gypsy,—

Proffered folks in passing—O for pay, what mattered?—
“I ’ll be doctor, I ’ll play builder, star I ’ll name—sign
read !”

Soon as prince was cured, tower built, and fate pre-
dicted,

“Who may you be ?” came the question ; when he an-
swered “*Petrus ipse*,”

"Just as we divined!" cried folks—"A wretch convicted

Long ago of dealing with the devil—you indeed!"

So, they cursed him roundly, all his labor's payment,
Motioned him—the convalescent prince would—to vacate
the presence :

Babylonians plucked his beard and tore his raiment,
Drove him from that tower he built: while, had he
peered at stars,

Town howled "Stone the quack who styles our Dog-star
—Sirius!"

Country yelled "Aroint the churl who prophesies we
take no pleasance

Under vine and fig-tree, since the year 's delirious,

Bears no crop of any kind,—all through the planet
Mars ! ”

Straightway would the whileom youngster grow a grisard,
Or, as case might hap, the hoary eld drop off and show
a stripling.

Town and country groaned—indebted to a wizard !
“ Curse—nay, kick and cuff him—fit requital of his
pains !

Gratitude in word or deed were wasted truly !
Rather make the Church amends by crying out on,
cramping, crippling
One who, on pretence of serving man, serves duly
Man’s arch foe : not ours, be sure, but Satan’s—his the
gains !

Peter grinned and bore it, such disgraceful usage :
 Somehow, cuffs and kicks and curses seem ordained his
 like to suffer :
 Prophet's pay with Christians, now as in the Jews' age,
 Still is—stoning : so, he meekly took his wage and
 went,
 —Safe again was found ensconced in those old quarters,
 Padua's blackest blindest byestreet,—none the worse,
 nay, somewhat tougher :
 “ Calculating ” quoth he “ soon I join the martyrs,
 Since, who magnify my lore, on burning me are bent.”¹

¹ “ Studiando le mie cifre col compasso,
 Rilevo che sarò presto sotterra,
 Perchè del mio saper si fa gran chiasso,
 E gl'ignoranti m'hanno mosso guerra.”

Said to have been found in a well at Abano in the last century.
 They were extemporaneously Englished thus : not as Father Prout
 chose to prefer them :

Now as, on a certain evening, to his alley
Peter slunk, all bruised and broken, sore in body, sick in
spirit,
Just escaped from Cairo where he launched a galley
Needing neither sails nor oars nor help of wind or tide,
—Needing but the fume of fire to set a-flying
Wheels like mad which whirled you quick—North, South,
where'er you pleased require it,—
That is—would have done so had not priests come
prying,
Broke his engine up and bastinadoed him beside : —

As he reached his lodging, stopped there unmolested,
Studying my ciphers with the compass,
I reckon—I soon shall be below-ground ;
Because, of my lore folks make great rumpus,
And war on myself makes each dull rogue round.

(Neighbours feared him, urchins fled him, few were bold
enough to follow)

While his fumbling fingers tried the lock and tested
Once again the queer key's virtue, oped the sullen door,—
Someone plucked his sleeve, cried “Master, pray your
pardon !

Grant a word to me who patient wait you in your arch-
way's hollow !

Hard on you men's hearts are : be not your heart hard
on

Me who kiss your garment's hem, O Lord of magic lore !

“ Mage—say I, who no less, scorning tittle-tattle,
To the vulgar give no credence when they prate of Peter's
magic,

Deem his art brews tempest, hurts the crops and cattle,
Hinders fowls from laying eggs and worms from spinning
silk,
Rides upon a he-goat, mounts at need a broomstick :
While the price he pays for this (so turns to comic what
was tragic)
Is—he may not drink—dreads like the Day of Doom's
tick—
One poor drop of sustenance ordained mere men—that 's
milk !

“ Tell such tales to Padua ! Think me no such dullard !
Not from these benighted parts did I derive my breath
and being !
I am from a land whose cloudless skies are coloured

Livelier, suns orb largelier, airs seem incense,—while,
on earth—

What, instead of grass, our fingers and our thumbs cull,
Proves true moly ! sounds and sights there help the
body's hearing, seeing,
Till the soul grows godlike : brief,—you front no numb-
scull

Shaming by ineptitude the Greece that gave him birth !

“ Mark within my eye its iris mystic-lettered—
That 's my name ! and note my ear—its swan-shaped
cavity, my emblem !
Mine 's the swan-like nature born to fly unfettered
Over land and sea in search of knowledge—food for
song

Art denied the vulgar ! Geese grow fat on barley,
Swans require ætherial provend, undesirous to resemble
'em—
Soar to seek Apollo,—favoured with a parley
Such as, Master, you grant me—who will not hold you long.

“Leave to learn to sing—for that your swan petitions :
Master, who possess the secret, say not nay to such a
suitor !
All I ask is—bless mine, purest of ambitions !
Grant me leave to make my kind wise, free, and happy !

How ?

Just by making me—as you are mine—their model !
Geese have goose-thoughts : make a swan their teacher
first, then co-adjutor,—

Let him introduce swan-notions to each noddle,—
Geese will soon grow swans, and men become what I am
now !

“ That’s the only magic--had but fools discernment,
Could they probe and pass into the solid through the
soft and seeming !
Teach me such true magic—now and no adjourn-
ment !

Teach your art of making fools subserve the man of
mind !

Magic is the power we men of mind should practise,
Draw fools to become our drudges—docile henceforth,
never dreaming—

While they do our hests for fancied gain—the fact is

What they toil and moil to get proves falsehood : truth 's
behind !

"See now ! you conceive some fabric—say, a mansion
Meet for monarch's pride and pleasure : this is truth—a
thought has fired you,

Made you fain to give some cramped concept expansion,

Put your faculty to proof, fulfil your nature's task.

First you fascinate the monarch's self : he fancies
He it was devised the scheme you execute as he inspired
you :

He in turn sets slaving insignificances
Toiling, moiling till your structure stands there—all you
ask !

"Soon the monarch 's known for what he was—a ninny :
Soon the rabble-rout leave labour, take their work-day
wage and vanish :

Soon the late puffed bladder, pricked, shows lank and
skinny—

'Who was its inflator?' ask we 'whose the giant
lungs ?'

Petri en pulmones! What though men prove ingrates ?
Let them—so they stop at crucifixion—buffet, ban and
banish !

Peter's power 's apparent : human praise—its din grates
Harsh as blame on ear unused to aught save angels'
tongues.

"Ay, there have been always, since our world existed,

Mages who possessed the secret-needed but to stand

still, fix eye

On the foolish mortal : straight was he enlisted

Soldier, scholar, servant, slave—no matter for the style !

Only through illusion ; ever what seemed profit—

Love or lucre—justified obedience to the *Ipse dixi* :

Work done—palace reared from pavement up to soffit—

Was it strange if builders smelt out cheating all the
while ?

“ Let them pelt and pound, bruise, bray you in a mortar !

What 's the odds to you who seek reward of quite
another nature ?

You 've enrolled your name where sages of your sort are,

—Michael of Constantinople, Hans of Halberstadt !

Nay and were you nameless, still you 've your conviction
You it was and only you—what signifies the nomencla-
ture ?—

Ruled the world in fact, though how you ruled be
fiction

Fit for fools : true wisdom's magic you—if e'er man—
had 't !

“ But perhaps you ask me ‘ Since each ignoramus
While he profits by such magic persecutes the bene-
factor,

What should I expect but—once I render famous
You as Michael, Hans and Peter—just one ingrate
more ?

If the vulgar prove thus, whatsoe'er the pelf be,

Pouched through my beneficence—and doom me
dungeoned, chained, or racked, or
Fairly burned outright—how grateful will yourself be
When, his secret gained, you match your—master just
before ?'

"That 's where I await you ! Please, revert a little !
What do folks report about you if not this—which,
though chimeric,
Still, as figurative, suits you to a tittle—
That,—although the elements obey your nod and wink,
Fades or flowers the herb you chance to smile or sigh at,
While your frown bids earth quake palled by obscuration
atmospheric,—
Brief, although through nature nought resists your *fiat*,

There 's yet one poor substance mocks you—milk you
may not drink !

“ Figurative language ! Take my explanation !
Fame with fear, and hate with homage, these your art
procures in plenty.

All 's but daily dry bread : what makes moist the
ration ?

Love, the milk that sweetens man his meal—alas, you
lack !

I am he who, since he fears you not, can love you.
Love is born of heart not mind, *de corde natus haud de
mente* ;

Touch my heart and love 's yours, sure as shines above
you

Sun by day and star by night though earth should go to
wrack !

"Stage by stage you lift me—kiss by kiss I hallow
Whose but your dear hand my helper, punctual as at
each new impulse

I approach my aim ? Shell chipped, the eaglet callow
Needs a parent's pinion-push to quit the eyrie's edge :
But once fairly launched forth, denizen of æther,
While each effort sunward bids the blood more freely
through each limb pulse,

Sure the parent feels, as gay they soar together,
Fully are all pains repaid when love redeems its pledge ! "

Then did Peter's tristful visage lighten somewhat,

Vent a watery smile as though inveterate mistrust were
thawing.

"Well, who knows?" he slow broke silence. "Mortals—
come what

Come there may—are still the dupes of hope there 's
luck in store.

Many scholars seek me, promise mounts and marvels :
Here stand I to witness how they step 'twixt me and
clapperclawing !

Dry bread,—that I 've gained me : truly I should starve
else :

But of milk, no drop was mine ! Well, shuffle cards
once more !"

At the word of promise thus implied, our stranger—

What can he but cast his arms, in rapture of embrace,
round Peter ?

" Hold ! I choke !" the mage grunts. " Shall I in the
manger

Any longer play the dog? Approach, my calf, and feed !
Bene . . . won't you wait for grace ?" But sudden
incense

Wool-white, serpent-solid, curled up—perfume growing
sweet and sweeter

Till it reached the young man's nose and seemed to win
sense

Soul and all from out his brain through nostril : yes,
indeed !

Presently the young man rubbed his eyes. " Where am I ?

'Too much bother over books ! Some reverie has proved
amusing.

What did Peter prate of ? 'Faith, my brow is clammy !
How my head throbs, how my heart thumps ! Can it
be I swooned ?

Oh, I spoke my speech out—cribbed from Plato's
tractate,

Dosed him with 'the Fair and Good,' swore—Dog of
Egypt—I was choosing

Plato's way to serve men ! What 's the hour ? Exact
eight !

Home now, and to-morrow never mind how Plato
mooned !

"Peter has the secret ! Fair and Good are products

(So he said) of Foul and Evil : one must bring to pass
the other.

Just as poisons grow drugs, steal through sundry odd ducts
Doctors name, and ultimately issue safe and changed.
— You 'd abolish poisons, treat disease with dainties
Such as suit the sound and sane ? With all such kick-
shaws vain you pother !

Arsenic 's the stuff puts force into the faint eyes,
Opium sets the brain to rights—by cark and care de-
ranged.

“What, he 's safe within door ?—would escape—no
question—

Thanks, since thanks and more I owe, and mean to pay
in time befitting.

What most presses now is—after night's digestion,
Peter, of thy precepts !—promptest practice of the same.
Let me see ! The wise man, first of all, scorns riches :
But to scorn them must obtain them : none believes in
his permitting
Gold to lie ungathered : who picks up, then pitches
Gold away—philosophizes : none disputes his claim.

“So with worldly honors : 't is by abdicating,
Incontestably he proves he could have kept the crown
discarded.
Sylla cuts a figure, leaving off dictating :
Simpletons laud private life ? ‘The grapes are sour,’
laugh we.
So, again—but why continue ? All 's tumultuous

Here : my head 's a-whirl with knowledge. Speedily
shall be rewarded

He who taught me ! Greeks prove ingrates ? So insult
you us ?

When your teaching bears its first-fruits, Peter—wait and
see ! ”

As the word, the deed proved ; ere a brief year's pas-
sage,

Fop—that fool he made the jokes on—now he made the
jokes for, *gratis* :

Hunks—that hoarder, long left lonely in his crass age—
Found now one appreciative deferential friend :
Powder-paint-and-patch, Hag Jezebel—recovered
Strange to say, the power to please, got courtship till she
cried *Jam satis !*

Fop be-flattered, Hunks be-friended, Hag be-lovered—
Nobody o'erlooked, save God—he soon attained his end.

As he lounged at ease one morning in his villa,
(Hag 's the dowry) estimated (Hunks' bequest) his coin
in coffer,
Mused on how a fool's good word (Fop's word) could fill a
Social circle with his praise, promote him man of mark,—
All at once —“An old friend fain would see your High-
ness !”

There stood Peter, skeleton and scarecrow, plain writ

Phi-lo-so-pher

In the woe-worn face—for yellowness and dryness,
Parchment—with a pair of eyes—one hope their feeble
spark.

" Did I counsel rightly ? Have you, in accordance,
Prospered greatly, dear my pupil ? Sure, at just the
stage I find you
When your hand may draw me forth from the mad war-
dance
Savages are leading round your master—down, not dead.
Padua wants to burn me : baulk them, let me linger
Life out—rueful though its remnant—hid in some safe
hole behind you !
Prostrate here I lie : quick, help with but a finger
Lest I house in safety's self—a tombstone o'er my head !

" Lodging, bite and sup, with—now and then—a copper
—Alms for any poorer still, if such there be,—is all my
asking.

Take me for your bedesman,—nay, if you think proper,
Menial merely,—such my perfect passion for repose !

Yes, from out your plenty Peter craves a pittance
—Leave to thaw his frozen hands before the fire whereat
you 're basking !

Double though your debt were, grant this boon—remit-
tance

He proclaims of obligation : 't is himself that owes ! "

"Venerated Master—can it be, such treatment
Learning meets with, magic fails to guard you from, by
all appearance ?

Strange ! for, as you entered,—what the famous feat
meant,

I was full of,—why you reared that fabric, Padua's boast.

Nowise for man's pride, man's pleasure, did you slyly
Raise it, but man's seat of rule whereby the world should
soon have clearance
(Happy world) from such a rout as now so vilely
Handles you—and hampers me, for which I grieve the
most.

“Since if it got wind you now were my familiar,
How could I protect you—nay, defend myself against the
rabble ?
Wait until the mob, now masters, willy-nilly are
Servants as they should be : then has gratitude full play !
Surely this experience shows how unbefitting
'T is that minds like mine should rot in ease and plenty.
Geese may gabble,

Gorge, and keep the ground : but swans are soon for
quitting

Earthly fare—as fain would I, your swan, if taught the way.

“Teach me, then, to rule men, have them at my pleasure !
Solely for their good, of course,—impart a secret worth
rewarding,

Since the proper life’s-prize ! Tantalus’s treasure
Aught beside proves, vanishes and leaves no trace at all.

Wait awhile, nor press for payment prematurely !
Over-haste defrauds you. Thanks ! since,—even while

I speak,—discarding

Sloth and vain delights, I learn how—swiftly, surely—
Magic sways the sceptre, wears the crown and wields the
ball !

“Gone again—what, is he? ‘Faith, he’s soon disposed
of!

Peter’s precepts work already, put within my lump their
leaven!

Ay, we needs must don glove would we pluck the rose—
doff

Silken garment would we climb the tree and take its fruit.
Why sharp thorn, rough rind? To keep unviolated
Either prize! We garland us, we mount from earth to
feast in heaven,

Just because exist what once we estimated
Hindrances which, better taught, as helps we now com-
pute.

“Foolishly I turned disgusted from my fellows!

Pits of ignorance—to fill, and heaps of prejudice—to
level—

Multitudes in motley, whites and blacks and yellows—

What a hopeless task it seemed to discipline the host !

Now I see my error. Vices act like virtues
—Not alone because they guard—sharp thorns—the rose
we first dishevel,

Not because they scrape, scratch—rough rind—through
the dirt-shoes

Bare feet cling to bole with, while the half-mooned boot
we boast.

“No, my aim is nobler, more disinterested !

Man shall keep what seemed to thwart him, since it
proves his true assistance,

Leads to ascertaining which head is the best head,
Would he crown his body, rule its members—lawless else.
Ignorant the horse stares, by deficient vision
Takes a man to be a monster, lets him mount, then, twice
the distance
Horse could trot unridden, gallops—dream Elysian !—
Dreaming that his dwarfish guide 's a giant,—jockeys
tell 's."

Brief, so worked the spell, he promptly had a riddance :
Heart and brain no longer felt the pricks which passed
for conscience-scruples :
Free henceforth his feet,—*Per Bacco*, how they did dance
Merrily through lets and checks that stopped the way
before !

Politics the prize now,—such adroit adviser,
Opportune suggester, with the tact that triples and
quadruples
Merit in each measure,—never did the Kaiser
Boast a subject such a statesman, friend, and something
more !

As he, up and down, one noonday, paced his closet
—Council o'er, each spark (his hint) blown flame, by
colleagues' breath applauded,
Strokes of statecraft hailed with "*Salomo si nôsset !*"
(His the nostrum)—every throw for luck come double-six,—
As he, pacing, hugged himself in satisfaction,
Thump—the door went. "What, the Kaiser? By none
else were I defrauded

Thus of well-earned solace. Since 't is fate's exaction,—
Enter, Liege my Lord ! Ha, Peter, you here? *Teneor
vix !*"

" Ah, Sir, none the less, contain you, nor wax irate !
You so lofty, I so lowly,—vast the space which yawns
between us !

Still, methinks, you—more than ever—at a high rate
Needs must prize poor Peter's secret since it lifts you
thus.

Grant me now the boon whereat before you boggled !
Ten long years your march has moved—one triumph—
(though e 's short)—*hactenus*,
While I down and down disastrously have joggled
Till I pitch against Death's door, the true *Nec Ultra Plus.*

" Years ago—some ten 't is—since I sought for shelter,
Craved in your whole house a closet, out of all your
means a comfort.

Now you soar above these : as is gold to spelter
So is power—you urged with reason—paramount to
wealth.

Power you boast in plenty : let it grant me refuge !
Houseroom now is out of question : find for me some
stronghold—some fort—

Privacy wherein, immured, shall this blind deaf huge
Monster of a mob let stay the soul I 'd save by stealth !

" Ay, for all too much with magic have I tampered !
—Lost the world, and gained, I fear, a certain place
I 'm to describe loth !

Still, if prayer and fasting tame the pride long pampered,
Mercy may be mine : amendment never comes too
late.

How can I amend beset by cursers, kickers ?
Pluck this brand from out the burning ! Once away, I
take my Bible-oath,
Never more—so long as life's weak lamp-flame
flickers—

No, not once I 'll teaze you, but in silence bear my
fate ! ”

“ Gently, good my Genius, Oracle unerring !
Strange now ! can you guess on what—as in you peeped
—it was I pondered ?
You and I are both of one mind in preferring

Power to wealth, but—here 's the point—what sort of power, I ask ?

Ruling men is vulgar, easy and ignoble :

Rid yourself of conscience, quick you have at beck and call the fond herd.

But who wields the crozier, down may fling the crow-bill :

That 's the power I covet now; soul's sway o'er souls—my task !

“ ‘ Well but,’ you object, ‘ you have it, who by glamour Dress up lies to look like truths, mask folly in the garb of reason :

Your soul acts on theirs, sure, when the people clamour Hold their peace, now fight now fondle,—earwigged through the brains.’

Possibly ! but still the operation 's mundane,
Grosser than a taste demands which—craving manna—
kecks at peason—
Power o'er men by wants material : why should one
deign
Rule by sordid hopes and fears—a grunt for all one's
pains ?

“No, if men must praise me, let them praise to purpose !
Would we move the world, not earth but heaven must be
our fulcrum—*pou sto !*
Thus I seek to move it : Master, why intérpose—
Baulk my climbing close on what 's the ladder's topmost
round ?
Statecraft 't is I step from : when by priestcraft hoisted

Up to where my foot may touch the highest rung which
fate allows toe,

Then indeed ask favour ! On you shall be foisted
No excuse : I 'll pay my debt, each penny of the
pound !

" Ho, my knaves without there ! Lead this worthy down-
stairs !

No farewell, good Paul—nay, Peter—what 's your name
remembered rightly ?

Come, he 's humble : out another would have flounced—
airs

Suitors often give themselves when our sort bow them
forth.

Did I touch his rags ? He surely kept his distance :

Yet, there somehow passed to me from him—where'er the
virtue might lie—

Something that inspires my soul—Oh, by assistance
Doubtlessly of Peter!—still, he 's worth just what he 's
worth !

“ ‘T is my own soul soars now: soaring—how? By
crawling !

I 'll to Rome, before Rome's feet the temporal-supreme
lay prostrate !

‘Hands’ (I 'll say) ‘proficient once in pulling, hauling
This and that way men as I was minded—feet now
clasp !’

Ay, the Kaiser's self has wrung them in his fervour !

Now—they only sue to slave for Rome, nor at one doit
the cost rate.

Rome's adopted child—no bone, no muscle, nerve or
Sinew of me but I 'll strain, though out my life I
gasp ! ”

As he stood one evening proudly—(he had traversed
Rome on horseback—peerless pageant !—claimed the
Lateran as new Pope)—
Thinking “ All 's attained now ! Pontiff ! Who could
have erst

Dreamed of my advance so far when, some ten years ago,
I embraced devotion, grew from priest to bishop,
Gained the Purple, bribed the Conclave, got the Two-
thirds, saw my coop ope,
Came out—what Rome hails me ! O were there a wish-
shop,

Not one wish more would I purchase—lord of all
below !

“ Ha—who dares intrude now—puts aside the arras ?

What, old Peter, here again, at such a time, in such a
presence ?

Satan sends this plague back merely to embarrass

Me who enter on my office—little needing you !

‘Faith, I ’m touched myself by age, but you look
Tithon !

Were it vain to seek of you the sole prize left—re-
juvenescence ?

Well, since flesh is grass which Time must lay his scythe
on,

Say your say and so depart and make no more ado ! ”

Peter faltered—coughing first by way of prologue—
“ Holiness, your help comes late : a death at ninety
little matters.

Padua, build poor Peter’s pyre now, on log roll log,
Burn away—I ’ve lived my day ! Yet here ’s the sting in
death—

I ’ve an author’s pride : I want my Book’s survival :
See, I ’ve hid it in my breast to warm me mid the rags
and tatters !

Save it—tell next age your Master had no rival !
Scholar’s debt discharged in full, be ‘ Thanks ’ my
latest breath !”

“ Faugh, the frowsy bundle—scribblings harum-scarum
Scattered o’er a dozen sheepskins ! What’s the name of
this farrago ?

Ha—‘*Conciliator Differentiarum*’—

Man and book may burn together, cause the world no
loss !

Stop—what else ? A tractate—eh, ‘*De Speciebus
Ceremonialis Ma-gi-æ*?’ I dream sure ! Hence, away, go,
Wizard,—quick avoid me ! Vain you clasp my knee,
buss

Hand that bears the Fisher’s ring or foot that boasts the
Cross !

“Help ! The old magician clings like an octopus !

Ah, you rise now—fuming, fretting, frowning, if I read
your features !

Frown, who cares ? We’re Pope—once Pope, you can’t
unpope us !

Good—you muster up a smile : that 's better ! Still so
brisk ?

All at once grown youthful ? But the case is plain ! Ass—
Here I dally with the fiend, yet know the Word—compels
all creatures

Earthly, heavenly, hellish. *A page, Sathanas !*

*Dicam verbum Salomonis—” “—dicite ! ” When—
whisk !—*

What was changed ? The stranger gave his eyes a
rubbing :

There smiled Peter's face turned back a moment at him
o'er the shoulder,
As the black-door shut, bang ! “So he scapes a
drubbing ! ”

(Quoth a boy who, unespied, had stopped to hear the talk).

“That’s the way to thank these wizards when they bid men

Benedicite! What ails you? You, a man, and yet no bolder?

Foreign Sir, you look but foolish!” “*Idmen, idmen!*” Groaned the Greek. “O Peter, cheese at last I know from chalk!”

Peter lived his life out, menaced yet no martyr,
Knew himself the mighty man he was—such knowledge
all his guerdon,
Left the world a big book—people but in part err
When they style a true *Scientiæ Com-pen-di-um*:

"*Admirationem incutit*" they sourly

Smile, as fast they shut the folio which myself was somehow spurred on

Once to ope : but love—life's milk which daily, hourly,
Blockheads lap—O Peter, still thy taste of love 's to
come !

Greek, was your ambition likewise doomed to failure ?

True, I find no record you wore purple, walked with axe
and fasces,

Played some antipope's part : still, friend, don 't turn
tail, you 're

Certain, with but these two gifts, to gain earth's prize in
time !

Cleverness uncurbed by conscience—if you ransacked

Peter's book you 'd find no potent spell like these to rule
the masses ;

Nor should want example, had I not to transact
Other business. Go your ways, you 'll thrive ! So ends
my rhyme.

When these parts Tiberius,—not yet Cæsar,—travelled,
Passing Padua, he consulted Padua's Oracle of Geryon
(God three-headed, thrice wise) just to get unravelled
Certain tangles of his future. “ Fling at Abano
Golden dice,” it answered : “ dropt within the fount
there,

Note what sum the pips present ! ” And still we see
each die, the very one,

Turn up, through the crystal,—read the whole account
there

Where 't is told by Suetonius,—each its highest throw.

Scarce the sportive fancy-dice I fling show “Venus :”
Still—for love of that dear land which I so oft in dreams
revisit—

I have—Oh, not sung ! but lilted (as—between us—
Grows my lazy custom) this its legend. What the lilt ?





DOCTOR —

II.

I



DOCTOR —

A Rabbi told me : On the day allowed
Satan for carping at God's rule, he came,
Fresh from our earth, to brave the angel-crowd.

“ What is the fault now ? ” “ This I find to blame :
Many and various are the tongues below,
Yet all agree in one speech, all proclaim

“ ‘ Hell has no might to match what earth can show :
Death is the strongest-born of Hell, and yet
Stronger than Death is a Bad Wife, we know.’

“ Is it a wonder if I fume and fret—

Robbed of my rights, since Death am I, and mine

The style of Strongest ? Men pay Nature’s debt

“ Because they must at my demand ; decline

To pay it henceforth surely men will please,

Provided husbands with bad wives combine

“ To baffle Death. Judge between me and these ! ”

“ Thyself shalt judge. Descend to earth in shape

Of mortal, marry, drain from froth to lees

‘ The bitter draught, then see if thou escape

Concluding, with men sorrowful and sage,

A Bad Wife’s strength Death’s self in vain would ape ! ”

How Satan entered on his pilgrimage,
Conformed himself to earthly ordinance,
Wived and played husband well from youth to age

Intrepidly—I leave untold, advance
Through many a married year until I reach
A day when—of his father's countenance

The very image, like him too in speech
As well as thought and deed,—the union's fruit
Attained maturity. “I needs must teach

“ My son a trade : but trade, such son to suit,
Needs seeking after. He a man of war?
Too cowardly ! A lawyer wins repute—

“ Having to toil and moil, though—both which are
Beyond this sluggard. There’s Divinity :
No, that’s my own bread-winner—that be far

‘ From my poor offspring ! Physic ? Ha, we ’ll try
If this be practicable. Where’s my wit
Asleep ?—since, now I come to think. . . Ay, ay !

“ Hither, my son ! Exactly have I hit
On a profession for thee. *Medicus*—
Behold, thou art appointed ! Yea, I spit

“ Upon thine eyes, bestow a virtue thus
That henceforth not this human form I wear
Shalt thou perceive alone, but—one of us

‘ By privilege—thy fleshly sight shall bear
Me in my spirit-person as I walk
The world and take my prey appointed there.

“ Doctor once dubbed—what ignorance shall baulk
Thy march triumphant ? Diagnose the gout
As cholic, and prescribe it cheese for chalk—

‘ No matter ! All ’s one : cure shall come about
And win thee wealth—fees paid with such a roar
Of thanks and praise alike from lord and lout

“ As never stunned man’s ears on earth before.

‘ How may this be ? ’ Why, that ’s my sceptic ! Soon
Truth will corrupt thee, soon thou doubt’st no more !

“ Why is it I bestow on thee the boon
Of recognising me the while I go
Invisibly among men, morning, noon

“ And night, from house to house, and—quick or slow—
Take my appointed prey ? They summon thee
For help, suppose : obey the summons ! so !

“ Enter, look round ! Where’s Death ? Know—I am he,
Satan who work all evil : I ’t is, bring
Pain to the patient in whate’er degree.

“ I, then, am there : first glance thine eye shall fling
Will find me—whether distant or at hand,
As I am free to do my spiriting

“At such mere first glance thou shalt understand
Wherefore I reach no higher up the room
Than door or window, when my form is scanned.

“Howe'er friends' faces please to gather gloom,
Bent o'er the sick,—howe'er himself desponds,—
In such case Death is not the sufferer's doom.

“Contrariwise, do friends rejoice my bonds
Are broken, does the captive in his turn
Crow ‘Life shall conquer?’ Nip these foolish fronds

“Of hope a-sprout, if haply thou discern
Me at the head—my victim's head, be sure !
Forth now ! This taught thee, little else to learn !”

And forth he went. Folks heard him ask demure
“How do you style this ailment? (There he peeps,
My father, through the arras !) Sirs, the cure

‘Is plain as A. B. C.! Experience steeps
Blossoms of pennyroyal half an hour
In sherris. *Sumat!*—Lo, how sound he sleeps—

“The subject you presumed was past the power
Of Galen to relieve!” Or else “How’s this?
Why call for help so tardily? Clouds lour

“Portentously indeed, Sirs! (Nought’s amiss:
He’s at the bed-foot merely.) Still, the storm
May pass averted—not by quacks, I wis

"Like you, my masters ! You, forsooth, perform
A miracle ? Stand, sciolists, aside !
At ignorance blood, ne'er so cold, grows warm ! "

Which boasting by result was justified,
Big as might words be : whether drugged or left
Drugless, the patient always lived, not died.

Great the heir's gratitude, so nigh bereft
Of all he prized in this world : sweet the smile
Of disconcerted rivals : "Cure ?—say, theft

"From Nature in despite of Art—so style
This off-hand kill-or-cure work ! You did much,
I had done more : folks cannot wait awhile ! "

But did the case change? was it—"Scarcely such
The symptoms as to warrant our recourse
To your skill, Doctor! Yet since just a touch

"Of pulse, a taste of breath, has all the force
With you of long investigation claimed
By others,—tracks an ailment to its source

"Intuitively,—may we ask unblamed
What from this pimple you prognosticate?"
"Death!" was the answer, as he saw and named

The coucher by the sick man's head. "Too late
You send for my assistance. I am bold
Only by Nature's leave, and bow to Fate!

“ Besides, you have my rivals : lavish gold !

How comfortably quick shall life depart

Cosseted by attentions manifold !

“ One day, one hour ago, perchance my art

Had done some service. Since you have yourselves

Chosen—before the horse—to put the cart,

“ Why, Sirs, the sooner that the sexton delves

Your patient’s grave, the better ! How you stare

—Shallow, for all the deep books on your shelves !

“ Fare you well, fumblers ! ” Do I need declare

What name and fame, what riches recompensed

The Doctor’s practice ? Never anywhere

Such an adept as daily evidenced
Each new vaticination ! Oh, not he
Like dolts who dallied with their scruples, fenced

With subterfuge, nor gave out frank and free
Something decisive ! If he said “ I save
The patient,” saved he was : if “ Death will be
“ His portion,” you might count him dead. Thus brave,
Behold our worthy, sans competitor
Throughout the country, on the architrave

Of Glory’s temple golden-lettered for
Machaon *redivivus* ! So, it fell
That, of a sudden, when the Emperor

Was smit by sore disease, I need not tell
If any other Doctor's aid was sought
To come and forthwith make the sick Prince well.

“ He will reward thee as a monarch ought.
Not much imports the malady ; but then,
He clings to life and cries like one distraught

“ For thee—who, from a simple citizen,
May'st look to rise in rank,—nay, haply wear
A medal with his portrait,—always when

“ Recovery is quite accomplished. There !
Pass to the presence ! ” Hardly has he crossed
The chamber's threshold when he halts, aware

Of who stands sentry by the head. All 's lost.

“Sire, nought avails my art : you near the goal,
And end the race by giving up the ghost.”

“How?” cried the monarch : “Names upon your roll
Of half my subjects rescued by your skill—
Old and young, rich and poor—crowd cheek by jowl

“And yet no room for mine? Be saved I will!
Why else am I earth's foremost potentate?
Add me to these and take as fee your fill

“Of gold—that point admits of no debate
Between us : save me, as you can and must,—
Gold, till your gown's pouch cracks beneath the
weight!”

This touched the Doctor. "Truly a home-thrust,
Parent, you will not parry ! Have I dared
Entreat that you forego the meal of dust

"—Man that is snake's meat—when I saw prepared
Your daily portion ? Never ! Just this once,
Go from his head, then,—let his life be spared !"

Whisper met whisper in the gruff response
"Fool, I must have my prey : no inch I budge
From where thou see'st me thus myself ensconce."

"Ah," moaned the sufferer, "by thy look I judge
Wealth fails to tempt thee : what i honors prove
More efficacious ? Nought to him I grudge

“ Who saves me. Only keep my head above
The cloud that ’s creeping round it—I ’ll divide
My empire with thee ! No ? What ’s left but—love ?

“ Does love allure thee ? Well then, take as bride
My only daughter, fair beyond belief !
Save me—to-morrow shall the knot be tied ! ”

“ Father, you hear him ! Respite ne’er so brief
Is all I beg : go now and come again
Next day, for aught I care : respect the grief

“ Mine will be if thy first-born sues in vain ! ”
“ Fool, I must have my prey ! ” was all he got
In answer. But a fancy crossed his brain.

“ I have it ! Sire, methinks a meteor shot
Just now across the heavens and neutralized
Jove’s salutary influence : ‘neath the blot

“ Plumb are you placed now : well that I surmised
The cause of failure ! Knaves, reverse the bed ! ”
“ Stay ! ” groaned the monarch, “ I shall be capsized—

“ Jolt—jolt—my heels uplift where late my head
Was lying—sure I’m turned right round at last !
What do you say now, Doctor ? ” Nought he said

For why ? With one brisk leap the Antic passed
From couch-foot back to pillow,—as before,
Lord of the situation. Long aghast

The Doctor gazed, then “ Yet one trial more
Is left me ” inwardly he uttered. “ Shame
Upon thy flinty heart ! Do I implore

“ This trifling favour in the idle name
Of mercy to the moribund ? I plead
The cause of all thou dost affect : my aim

“ Befits my author ! Why would I succeed ?
Simply that by success I may promote
The growth of thy pet virtues—pride and greed.

“ But keep thy favors !—curse thee ! I devote
Henceforth my service to the other side.
No time to lose : the rattle 's in his throat.

“ So,—not to leave one last resource untried,—
Run to my house with all haste, somebody !
Bring me that knobstick thence, so often plied

“ With profit by the astrologer—shall I
Disdain its help, the mystic Jacob’s-Staff?
Sire, do but have the courage not to die

“ Till this arrive ! Let none of you dare laugh !
Though rugged its exterior, I have seen
That implement work wonders, send the chaff

“ Quick and thick flying from the wheat—I mean,
By metaphor, a human sheaf it thrashed
Flail-like. Go fetch it ! Or—a word between

"Just you and me, friend!—go bid, unabashed,
My mother, whom you 'll find there, bring the stick
Herself—herself, mind!" Out the lackey dashed

Zealous upon the errand. Craft and trick
Are meat and drink to Satan: and he grinned
—How else?—at an excuse so politic

For failure: scarce would Jacob's-Staff rescind
Fate's firm decree! And ever as he neared
The agonizing one, his breath like wind

Froze to the marrow, while his eye-flash seared
Sense in the brain up: closer and more close
Pressing his prey, when at the door appeared

—Who but his Wife the Bad? Whereof one dose,
One grain, one mite of the medicament,
Sufficed him. Up he sprang. One word, too gross

To soil my lips with,—and through cieling went
Somehow the Husband. “That a storm ’s dispersed
We know for certain by the sulphury scent !

“Hail to the Doctor! Who but one so versed
In all Dame Nature’s secrets had prescribed
The staff thus opportunely? Style him first

“And foremost of physicians!” “I’ve imbibed
Elixir surely,” smiled the prince,—“have gained
New lease of life. Dear Doctor, how you bribed

“ Death to forego me, boots not : you 've obtained
My daughter and her dowry. Death, I 've heard,
Was still on earth the strongest power that reigned,

—
“ Except a Bad Wife ! ” Whereunto demurred
Nowise the Doctor, so refused the fee
—No dowry, no bad wife !

“ You think absurd
This tale ? ”—the Rabbi added : “ True, our Talmud
Boasts sundry such : yet—have our elders erred
In thinking there 's some water there, not all mud ? ”
I tell it, as the Rabbi told it me.

PAN AND LUNA.



PAN AND LUNA.

Si credere dignum est.—*Georgic.* III. 390.

O worthy of belief I hold it was,
Virgil, your legend in those strange three lines !
No question, that adventure came to pass
One black night in Arcadia : yes, the pines,
Mountains and vallies mingling made one mass
Of black with void black heaven : the earth's confines,
The sky's embrace,—below, above, around,
All hardened into black without a bound.

Fill up a swart stone chalice to the brim
With fresh-squeezed yet fast-thickening poppy-juice :
See how the sluggish jelly, late a-swim,
Turns marble to the touch of who would loose
The solid smooth, grown jet from rim to rim,
By turning round the bowl ! So night can fuse
Earth with her all-comprising sky. No less,
Light, the least spark, shows air and emptiness.

And thus it proved when—diving into space,
Stript of all vapour, from each web of mist
Utterly film-free—entered on her race
The naked Moon, full-orbed antagonist
Of night and dark, night's dowry : peak to base,
Upstarted mountains, and each valley, kissed

To sudden life, lay silver-bright : in air
Flew she revealed, Maid-Moon with limbs all bare.

Still as she fled, each depth—where refuge seemed—
Opening a lone pale chamber, left distinct
Those limbs : mid still-retreating blue, she teemed
Herself with whiteness,—virginal, uncinct
By any halo save what finely gleamed
To outline not disguise her : heaven was linked
In one accord with earth to quaff the joy,
Drain beauty to the dregs without alloy.

Whereof she grew aware. What help ? When, lo,
A succourable cloud with sleep lay dense :

Some pine-tree-top had caught it sailing slow,
And tethered for a prize : in evidence
Captive lay fleece on fleece of piled-up snow
Drowsily patient : flake-heaped how or whence,
The structure of that succourable cloud,
What matter? Shamed she plunged into its shroud.

Orbed—so the woman-figure poets call
Because of rounds on rounds—that apple-shaped
Head which its hair binds close into a ball
Each side the curving ears—that pure undraped
Pout of the sister paps—that . . . Once for all,
Say—her consummate circle thus escaped
With its innumerable circlets, sank absorbed,
Safe in the cloud—O naked Moon full-orbed !

But what means this? The downy swathes combine,
Conglobe, the smothery coy-caressing stuff
Curdles about her! Vain each twist and twine
Those lithe limbs try, encroached on by a fluff
Fitting as close as fits the dented spine
Its flexible ivory outside-flesh : enough!
The plumpy drifts contract, condense, constringe,
Till she is swallowed by the feathery springe.

As when a pearl slips lost in the thin foam
Churned on a sea-shore, and, o'er-frothed, conceits
Herself safe-housed in Amphitrite's dome,—
If, through the bladdery wave-worked yeast, she meets
What most she loathes and leaps from,—elf from
gnome

No gladlier,—finds that safest of retreats
Bubbles about a treacherous hand wide ope
To grasp her—(divers who pick pearls so grope)—

So lay this Maid-Moon clasped around and caught
By rough red Pan, the god of all that tract :
He it was schemed the snare thus subtly wrought
With simulated earth-breath,—wool-tufts packed
Into a billowy wrappage. Sheep far-sought
For spotless shearings yield such : take the fact
As learned Virgil gives it,—how the breed
Whitens itself for ever : yes, indeed !

If one fore-father ram, though pure as chalk
From tinge on fleece, should still display a tongue

Black 'neath the beast's moist palate, prompt men
baulk

The propagating plague : he gets no young :
They rather slay him,—sell his hide to caulk
Ships with, first steeped in pitch,—nor hands are wrung
In sorrow for his fate : protected thus,
The purity we love is gained for us.

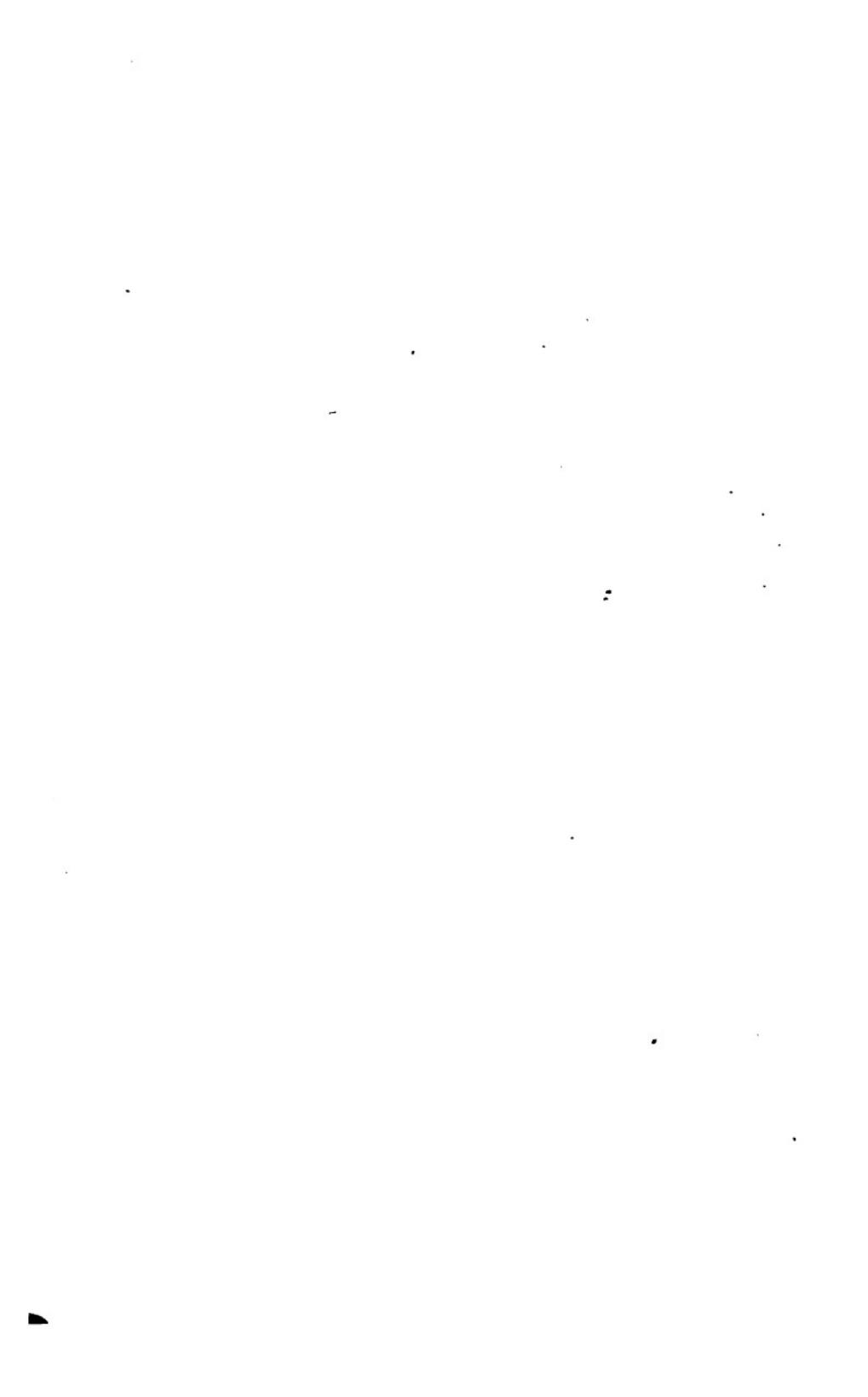
So did Girl-Moon, by just her attribute
Of unmatched modesty betrayed, lie trapped,
Bruised to the breast of Pan, half god half brute,
Raked by his bristly boar-sward while he lapped
—Never say, kissed her ! that were to pollute
Love's language—which moreover proves unapt
To tell how she recoiled—as who finds thorns

Where she sought flowers—when, feeling, she touched
—horns !

Then—does the legend say ?—first moon-eclipse
Happened, first swooning-fit which puzzled sore
The early sages ? Is that why she dips
Into the dark, a minute and no more,
Only so long as serves her while she rips
The cloud's womb through and, faultless as before,
Pursues her way ? No lesson for a maid
Left she, a maid herself thus trapped, betrayed ?

Ha, Virgil ? Tell the rest, you ! “To the deep
Of his domain the wildwood, Pan forthwith
Called her, and so she followed”—in her sleep,

Surely?—"by no means spurning him." The myth
Explain who may ! Let all else go, I keep
—As of a ruin just a monolith—
Thus much, one verse of five words, each a boon :
Arcadia, night, a cloud, Pan, and the moon.



“ Touch him ne'er so lightly, into song he broke :
Soil so quick-receptive,—not one feather-seed,
Not one flower-dust fell but straight its fall awoke
Vitalizing virtue : song would song succeed
Sudden as spontaneous—prove a poet-soul !”

Indeed?

Rock's the song-soil rather, surface hard and bare :
Sun and dew their mildness, storm and frost their rage
Vainly both expend,—few flowers awaken there :
Quiet in its cleft broods—what the after age
Knows and names a pine, a nation's heritage.

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